



Saskatchewan Association
of Rural Municipalities



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Western Canadian Municipal Associations Gather Virtually for Annual Meeting

Leaders representing the municipal associations from Western Canada's three prairie provinces met virtually Friday to discuss common issues.

Municipalities of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) hosted the annual meeting which brings together elected officials and staff from Municipalities of Saskatchewan and SARM, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM), the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA).

Items of discussion included access to reliable broadband, federal legislation and costs related to public safety, disaster mitigation, and energy infrastructure.

On access to reliable broadband, the associations welcomed the additional \$1 billion proposed in the 2021-22 federal budget to support a more rapid rollout of broadband projects.

"Broadband is a fundamental need in our society and is one of the keys to allowing smaller municipalities to retain residents and thrive," Municipalities of Saskatchewan President Rodger Hayward said. "Investments in broadband are investments in the future of our communities."

Relating to public safety, the associations discussed the federal legislation allowing municipal gun bans and the rising costs of policing. The Government of Canada tabled Bill C-21 on February 7, 2021. The bill would give municipalities discretion to ban handguns through bylaws restricting their possession, storage, and transportation.

"Since gun-related crime does not respect local borders, measures to deal with this issue should focus on national solutions. Bill C-21 encourages a patchwork approach which will be ineffective and confusing. This issue should not be downloaded to municipalities," stated AMM President Kam Blight.

As many municipalities contract RCMP for policing services, the associations are concerned with the anticipated rise in costs with the unionization of the police force. Municipalities with RCMP contracts have been encouraged to set aside 2.5 per cent/year for budgeting purposes, though, based on comparisons with non-RCMP officer salaries, the figures could be higher than projected.

"As many municipalities contract RCMP for policing services, the associations are concerned with the anticipated rise in costs with the contract negotiations of the police force," said AUMA

President, Barry Morishita. “Municipalities with RCMP contracts have been encouraged to plan for future additional costs. Unfortunately, there is a lack of clarity on the details which causes ongoing concern.”

The associations also discussed the rising costs of disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response, as communities experience more severe weather events. The Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements program, which provides funding reimbursements through provinces for expenses and damages resulting from natural or manmade disasters, estimates that over the next five years, annual transfers to provinces will be \$229 million due to storms and \$673 million for flooding.

“Municipalities are at the forefront of disaster response, and preparedness and mitigation are ongoing priorities to protect residents and needed infrastructure,” said Paul McLaughlin, RMA President. “Engaging with other municipal leaders from across the prairie provinces has demonstrated that ongoing focus is needed to mitigate impacts and build resilience, contributing to the need to work towards a reduction in financial assistance historically provided in response to disasters.”

Representatives from Western Canada’s municipal associations also discussed energy infrastructure, focusing on the establishment of national utility corridors, and the need for pipelines to get resources to market and reduce risks around the transportation of dangerous goods by rail.

“The Canadian energy sector produces safe, environmentally friendly, ethical energy,” stated SARM President Ray Orb. “Canada has an incredible opportunity to increase our self-reliance and it is critical that we increase public awareness about our energy and build confidence across the country.”

Other discussion items included the introduction of recall legislation in Alberta, the phasing out of the education property tax in Manitoba, the development of the Canadian Water Agency, and aquatic invasive species.

The annual inter-provincial meeting is an opportunity for leaders from the three prairie provinces to not only discuss issues but also share information and ideas.

“We value this opportunity to come together and have open discussions about the issues that are impacting municipalities in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba,” said Rodger Hayward, Municipalities of Saskatchewan President.

“Today’s meeting reaffirmed the strong voices that Western Canada brings to the table at the municipal level, and its promising that we are united on many key issues,” stated Orb. “WCMA strengthens our voice at the national level.”

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